

Sermon preached by Mr J K Popham
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HEBREWS 12 v 3

"For consider Him that endured such contradiction
of sinners against Himself, lest ye be wearied and
faint in your minds"

There is always, where grace is, a conflict between the flesh and the Spirit. That Scripture is made good in the experience of every child of God - "For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit and the Spirit against the flesh, and these are contrary the one to the other, so that ye cannot do the things that ye would". And the constant opposition of the flesh brings many questions, serious questions, and the prevalence, the occasional prevalence of sin in our members, begets very heavy fears as to our state and standing before God. This induces in the mind weariness and faintness and many heavy questions as to how matters are and how they will be with us even to the end and at the end. And the Holy Ghost in great kindness to such tried people, in the text draws their attention to the Lord Jesus. He would have the people of God look upon Him who, while here, never pleased His countrymen. They were always contradicting Him, opposing Him, tempting Him, trying to overcome Him in one way or another. And He had also before Him the supreme trial, namely the cross. But likewise, He had set before Him a joy, the joy of having His people redeemed from their wickedness and justified from their guilt, and having them with Himself, being redeemed. And the Holy Ghost says, in these first verses - "Wherefore seeing we are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses (witnesses to the faithfulness of God) let us", troubled as we are, afflicted as we are, "lay aside every weight and the sin which doth so easily beset us and let us run with patience the race that is set before us". Run, not aimlessly; run, not without an object to attain, an end to reach, a crown to win; "looking unto Jesus". This looking to Him wherever it is, takes the attention of the soul away from all other objects, looking exclusively alone to Him. And consider Him as looking to Him under this particular regard, that He was troubled, opposed, hated, afflicted. But, for

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that which was set before Him and promised to Him by His Father, He endured the cross, bore it, despised the same, and the constant contradiction of sinners against Him; endured the temptation of the devil, despising the shame, taking no account of it, and is now, having done the will of God His Father, and having redeemed His people from their sins, sat down at the right-hand of the throne of God. So the Spirit by Paul says - Now you, His followers, look to Him.

So, first of all, the text directs us to this great and wondrous Person, Jesus Christ, to consider Him in a particular way. And then we are exhorted to continue this lest we become wearied of the conflict. We must be wearied in it, but lest we be wearied of it and faint, life ebbing, seeming about to expire. There is no natural remedy set before us, no exhortation to be more resolute, more courageous, more determined to hold on; nothing of the kind, but looking unto Jesus, considering Him. This means, as enabled to do so, we shall find our souls inspired with courage and be enabled to say with the Psalmist - "I will call upon the Lord". He has heard my prayer; He has not turned away His mercy from me and therefore I will call upon the Lord as long as I live.

Let us first, as enabled, look at the first part of the text. "For consider Him that endured such contradiction of sinners against Himself". Consider His perfection, consider the love that brought Him into the world, consider the loveliness of His Person and the greatness of His mission and the blessed end He had before Him. And yet, notwithstanding He was opposed, contradicted, hated without a cause. He said John came neither eating nor drinking and they said he had a devil. The Son of Man came eating and drinking in the ordinary way and they say of Him He is a gluttonous man, a winebibber and a friend of publicans and sinners. They always contradicted Him. The pharisees repeatedly went to Him and tempted Him; now asking for a sign, now seeking to ensnare Him by bringing a coin of the realm with the image and superscription of Caesar, saying is it lawful to pay tribute to him? We are Jews, ought we to pay tribute? When, in reply to His question - "Whose image and superscription is this?" - they said "Caesar's", He answered "Render unto God the things that are God's and to Caesar the things that are Caesar's". Throughout they were always contradicting Him, speaking against Him. To the man

whose eyes were opened, the Pharisees said - "Give God the praise, this man is a sinner." Though He had done this miracle, they said "This man is a sinner". When He cast out devils then they said He did it by the prince of devils; as if a house divided against itself could stand. He never pleased His fellow countrymen.

Consider this, consider who sent Him. His Father sent Him in love, sent Him to die for the people given to Him to save. Consider the Lord Himself willingly, lovingly coming, saying to His Father - "I delight to do Thy will, O My God: yea, Thy law is within My heart. I have preached righteousness in the great congregation: Lo I have not refrained My lips, O Lord, thou knowest. I have not hid Thy righteousness within My heart". Consider that He had the fulness of the Spirit; the Spirit given to Him without measure. Consider the great end He had in view, especially if God has taught any of us and made us believe that He came to save us. O what a sight for faith when God gives it; a suffering, injured, contradicted, maligned, tempted Saviour. He could not move, as it were, without being opposed. And yet He endured all this. He endured the shame, the ignominy of death on the cross, crucified between two thieves, and He despised, took no account of the injuries done to Him so as to turn Him away from the path that was opened to Him, in which He was commanded to obey His Father. Have we been led to this consideration of Christ? The view of Him as Almighty God incarnate may sometimes have so filled our minds as that the consideration of His humiliation and of His sufferings may have been absent from us, but conflict in our own cases, as sanctified by the Spirit of God, will bring us to this. Consider Christ. You are dealt with, you are opposed, you are tempted, you are weak, you are full of sin, and He had no sin of His own. Your conflict tires you, wears out your life as it were. Your sins weary you, your corruptions discourage you and many questions come up. Am I God's?; has He quickened me? Has He begun a good work in me? Have I really been born again? Have I His fear in my heart? How is it with you? There is a weariness in it, a faintness induced by it. The Lord help us to look at this great matter, an injured, outraged, despised, contradicted Saviour. He never opened His mouth in the Judgment Hall. He was dumb when He was falsely accused and wicked, lying men were suborned to bear false testimony against Him. He opened not His mouth. He was led as a lamb to the slaughter and as a

sheep before her shearers is dumb, so He opened not His mouth. He was dumb when He might have spoken, quiet when by one word He could have consigned all His opposers to a deserved hell, smitten them instantly by one look. Yet He endured all. O weary people of God, the Apostle does not say, you ought not to be weary, but he says Consider One, consider the dear Saviour on whom your hopes are fixed and built. Consider the depths of His humiliation, consider His quietness when He might have spoken, consider His endurance of the cross, consider His despising the shame. I think this example that is thus set before us in the Scripture would, if it were set before our feeble faith, make us deeply ashamed of our shame, of our weakness and weariness and faintness.

The Apostle, speaking to these people, says - you have forgotten something. You are dispersed, you are away from your home, the land of promise. Sin has forfeited that. Now you believe through grace, and I write this to you; you have forgotten something. You have forgotten your ancient Scripture which said "Blessed is the man whom Thou chasteneth and teacheth him out of Thy law". You have forgotten the exhortation - "My son despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of Him."

There are two things I would just name to you in respect of chastening. One is some particular dealing of God with you, some way in which His hand is heavy on you, when He brings your heart down with labour, you fall down and there is none to help you. Some affliction may be laid on your body or your circumstances or some peculiar, bitter temptation of the devil may be sent to you - chastened for some sin or sins. And there is a great aptness, through unbelief, in every child of God to forget this exhortation. Either to despise it by lifting up the head and saying - this is a grief and I must bear it and get through as well as I can, which is not enduring it - or fainting under it which makes you say - I shall never get through. It makes you fear God is against you. And the second thing in chastening is the work of God in the conscience so that when a sinful, poor, weak child of God considers his own ways, he judges himself. He judges himself as having departed from God by an unbelieving heart. He judges himself as possessing very little grace, if any, as possessing much pride, much vanity, much carelessness. Many departures from the Lord

he is conscious of, and he judges himself. Now what does the Holy Ghost say about that? He says if we judge ourselves we are chastened of the Lord. A divine instruction this is. May the Lord seal this instruction in our hearts. You know if you are judging yourselves. It is different from merely saying O I know I am wrong often. It is a solemn searching, under the light of the Holy Ghost as with candles, of your hearts. "Let us search and try our ways and turn unto the Lord".

Now look at the Word in the next place - "Lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds". You have a strong enemy - indwelling sin. The Apostle Paul speaks of it as a body of death. Of himself he said - I do not the good that I would. I do the evil that I would not. This is too well, if I may say that, too well understood by every exercised child of God. You know, who are exercised with it, what it means. Here is a mind that would rise to God and here is a body of death that hangs all its weight on your spirit and keeps you away, prevents you from what you would do and be in your feelings. A body of death, a loathsome body of death, a corrupt weight on your spirit, like a corpse tied on your back; you cannot get rid of it. This carnal mind, enmity against God. Not enmity in the child of God always as actively hating God, but enmity in subtle movements. Here is the Word of God on your table and here is a book, a newspaper, or something. A subtle enmity, that does not appear to be enmity but only perhaps, as you might think at the moment a passing indisposition, but the truth of it is, enmity makes you prefer the paper before the Word of God. O how wearying it is, how tiring it is, to have this more or less every day with you. You would be seeking after holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord, and you find corruption, corrupt thoughts, vain desires, wicked wishes, a wandering mind gadding to the very end of the earth. And if you come across the word in this chapter - "Without holiness no man shall see the Lord", follow this holiness - you will say I do not do it, I am carnally minded, I am sold under sin. You find in this epistle an exhortation like this - "Take heed lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God" and you say I do not take that heed. I am caught and I am carried away. Heedless, I am carried away. And this is a terrible thing. You get what you deemed some injury from a fellow creature, and O what havoc does a revengeful spirit work in you. O fallen nature is very glad of

one part of the Word of God - An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, foot for foot, life for life. Fallen nature does not object to that. but likes it. You are tempted one day to some evil and there is no power to resist it. You go after it, vanity, some tinsel is hanged up before your eyes and you are bewitched. You look at it and you depart from God, you depart from Him, no seeking Him, for the time being. this temptation has got you. Then in the conscience there is a protest - this is wrong; this will damage your soul; this will displease your best Friend. Need I enlarge on these horrible things with which, more or less distinctly, every child of God has to do? He has to bear them, they wear him out, they weaken his strength, they dry up his courage, they bring into question his state before God. Indulgence of sin always is followed by some more or less distinct questioning of your state before God. You may say - Am I born again? Could I do these things which I do if the life of God were in my soul? Could I be as proud as I am, as haughty, as angry, as foolish, as vain as I am if the fear, if the life of God were in my soul? And so this weariness and faintness is felt.

Now the apostle sets before these weary and faint people a dear Redeemer. He endured, consider that. Consider the endurance of the Lord Jesus. "I came" he said "not to do mine own will but the will of Him that sent Me". That was an endurance. O the things that were put in His way. But God, His Father, says of Him in Isaiah "Who is blind but My servant?, or deaf, as My Messenger that I sent? who is blind as he that is perfect, and blind as the Lord's servant? Seeing many things, but thou observest not; opening the ears, but he heareth not", which is to say, He was not turned aside. He endured, He set His face steadfastly to go to Jerusalem where He knew He would be destroyed by men in their intention. But He set His face; He must go to Jerusalem. He must endure the cross; it was given to Him to endure and so He endured. Do you in any measure answer to this? What, has God promised His people two heavens? grace here and no trouble, and heaven hereafter. No. He has said this - "In the world ye shall have tribulation". He has said this - "It is enough that the servant be as his Lord. If they have hated Me, they will hate you also." Well my friends, this endurance of the afflictions and contradictions and temptations is following the blessed Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

Consider this then, consider the end, the great end that Christ had in view. It was having His children with Him. This was the joy that was set before Him. The path of life was set before Him by His Father as you have it in the Psalm - "Thou wilt show Me the path of life; at Thy right-hand there are pleasures for ever more". What has God set before you? - tribulation, tribulation, tribulation. Plenty of chaff for tribulation to separate from the wheat. What has He set before you? - the fiery affliction, fiery trial which is to try your faith. What has He set before you? - a tempting devil, a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour. What else? A blessed end. Where I am there shall my servant also be. To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with Me in My throne, even as I also overcame and am sat down with My Father in His throne. Now here are three things, tribulation, temptation, a roaring lion. O but there is yet another and that is the joy that is promised, the kingdom that is promised, the heaven that is promised. And moreover there is the help by the way that is promised - "I will see you again". "Your joy no man shall take from you". "I will not leave you comfortless, I will come to you" and I will send the Spirit to you and He shall help your infirmities. He shall overcome your prayerlessness by being in you the Spirit of grace and of supplications. Therefore, says Paul, consider all these things first in Christ and then in your own soul's experience. The helps, the mercies, the comforts, and the blessing and the honour of chastening.

"Lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds". We are very faint; I am often; get very wearied in the conflict. The Holy Ghost sets forth the conflict in Galatians where, by Paul's pen He writes - "The flesh lusteth against the Spirit." O we are well acquainted with that are not some of us? But the Spirit against the flesh - of that we have a hope. But these we know to be contrary the one to the other, so that we cannot do the things that we would, which means both ways. We cannot do the good that we would; we cannot do the evil that we would. No, there is a check, but there is weariness. Am I always to be thus you say sometimes. This carnal mind, am I to carry it always with me? This enmity is it always to be with me? A vain and foolish, proud spirit, is this always to be with me? Yes, yes, you will never be rid of the old man which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts. Then you say that is a wearisome thing, a trying thing, a painful

path. True, but remember who went before you. Remember Him who was every day and every minute as it were, tempted by man, contradicted, hated without a cause, and remember that He went through, He undertook, He went through and then remember that God honours you. O it is an honour to walk in the steps of the Lord Jesus. It is an honour to be chastened in both ways that I mentioned, a great honour. If two boys in the street are quarrelling and the father of one of them passes by, which of the two does he take hold of? Which of the two does he reprimand and punish? His own son. God sees His dear children, some of them walking in wrong ways and quarrelling even with Himself at times, and what does He do? He chastens, He chastens His son betimes. And I believe I am right according to Scripture and true experience when I say it is an honour conferred on a foolish son to be chastened by his father. It is a great mercy, a saving mercy, to be thus dealt with. Here then we have two objects, first a suffering, contradicted Saviour, and then a poor, feeble believer, who is very apt to faint, very apt to be wearied in the conflict and say - it is no use, I shall never get through. No, says Paul, do not so conclude. You have a Father in heaven and He notices you and when you are wrong He chastens you. He touches you in your own conscience and your conscience concludes He is right, I am wrong. He is good, I am wicked. And so by seeing Christ suffering new courage sometimes is taken in. "Did Christ my Lord suffer and shall I repine?" Did the Head suffer and shall a member of His body complain of sufferings? "Shall Simon bear the cross alone and all the rest go free?" Shall the Lord bear His cross and all the people go free? "No. There's a cross for everyone and there's a cross for me." So afflicted saints, look by the help of God at this great example. Consider what the great cloud of witnesses says. That cloud says - God is faithful. But what did the cloud suffer? Persecution and martyrdom. Yet God was with them in all, and so they say - God is faithful by whom you were called and He will fulfil His promise to you never to leave you nor forsake you. An experimental religion is a religion of suffering very much. It is also a religion of consolation and of divine sustenance and heavenly smiles and comfortable and good words spoken. An old writer says - "All honey would undo us; all chastening would kill us." God says - "I will not always chide lest the soul which I have made should fail before Me". He will not always be finding fault, but He does say to His people

Look to Jesus, kind as strong
Mercy joined with power

May the Lord help us. O tried Christians look to this blessed Lord
Jesus and hear His gracious Word. Faint not

Look to Jesus, kind as strong

Come to Me for rest in your weariness. Come to Me for new courage when
you are cast down. There is a fulness in Me.

A fulness resides in Jesus our Head
And ever abides to answer our need

The Lord help us to walk in this path of tribulation unto the end, and
when the end comes this will be it, the word will be spoken - Come
overcomers, sit with Me in My throne.

AMEN.